



Katrina's Jewish Voices

Oral History

Of

Lis Kahn

Rosalind Hinton, Oral Historian

August 16, 2007

New Orleans, LA

PREFACE

Katrina's Jewish Voices is a project of the Jewish Women's Archive in collaboration with the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Launched in August 2006, almost a year after Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast, the project collected oral histories and digital artifacts to create the most comprehensive record of the Jewish community's experiences of Katrina in existence.

The 85 oral history interviews draw on the personal experiences of American Jews whose lives were touched by one of the most devastating humanitarian and natural disasters in American history. Collectively, the interviews reveal the values underlying American Jewish life at the turn of the 21st century, the fragility of our sense of security and well-being, and the connectedness of our lives – across boundaries of race, religion, and culture, as well as geographic distance and generational divides. From the struggles of individuals in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast Jewish communities to rebuild their lives and the efforts of people across the country to provide support and relief, *Katrina's Jewish Voices* provides eloquent and intimate testimony to the resilience of the human spirit and the power of community in the face of daunting challenges.

Access: *Katrina's Jewish Voices* interviews were recorded on digital video. The recordings and transcripts are available at the Jewish Women's Archive in Brookline, Massachusetts and the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life in Jackson, Mississippi.

Citation information: Please use the following format when citing this oral history:
Oral History of FirstName LastName, YYYY/Month/DD. Brookline, MA: Jewish Women's Archive and Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. [If you retrieve this oral history from a website, please add: Retrieved from <http://XXX>, TODAY'S DATE.]

Jewish Women's Archive: Founded in 1995, the Jewish Women's Archive (JWA) is a national non-profit organization whose mission is to uncover, chronicle, and transmit to a broad public the rich history of American Jewish women. For further information about JWA, visit jwa.org or send an email to webadmin@jwa.org.

The Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) is a private, not-for-profit corporation dedicated to providing educational and rabbinic services to isolated Jewish communities, documenting and preserving the rich history of the Southern Jewish experience, and promoting a Jewish cultural presence throughout a 13-state region. For further information about ISJL, visit isjl.org or send an e mail to information@isjl.org.



Oral history interviews in the *Katrina's Jewish Voices* collection are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 United States License. For uses beyond the scope of this license, please send an email to: webadmin@jwa.org.

LIS KAHN

RH: OK. This is Rosalind Hinton interviewing Lis Kahn, at 4540 Bancroft, her home in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today is August 16th, 2007. I'm conducting the interview for the Katrina's Jewish Voices Project of the Jewish Women's Archive, and the Goldring Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Lis, do you agree to be interviewed and understand that the interview will be video recorded?

LK: Yes.

RH: Could we just start with a little of your general and your Jewish education and how you came to be in New Orleans?

LK: Well, let me see. I moved over here from Denmark in 1960 --
December, November --

RH: Why don't you turn that off for a minute?

(break in audio)

RH: Let's try this one more time. A little about your Jewish and your general education.

LK: I'm an RN, and I'm an attorney. And my Jewish education? Most of it I got here actually in this country. And you said when did I come here to New Orleans? I came to New Orleans in 1991. I used to live in Indiana, I actually last place of my residence was in Fort Wayne, Indiana. My then husband is deceased, died in Fort Wayne, Indiana. And I happened to meet Hugo there. Hugo had some relatives in Fort Wayne, they happened to have a function in the synagogue and we

belong to the same synagogue. And Hugo and part of his family came for, actually it was a Bar Mitzvah. Hugo's wife had died and he was there with his mother-in-law actually and one of his daughters. And we just very briefly met.

RH: And?

LK: And then I was working at the time for Lincoln National Life Insurance, as an attorney/specialist. I was credentialing hospitals and physicians for our network of excellence, and I had an occasion to come down here to credential physicians at Ochsner as well as Ochsner Hospital for transplants. And when I did that, which was maybe about eight or nine months I think after we had initially met in Fort Wayne, I kind of hooked up once again with Hugo, met him down here. Actually I didn't really know him at all when I came down here on that business trip. And then as they say --

RH: The rest is history.

LK: Sort of, yes. And then I moved down here then, and I think this was in -
-

RH: Here, let me see if I can help you with that. (adjusts microphone)

LK: I moved down here with my youngest daughter, who at the time was 13. She had just had her Bat Mitzvah in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Hugo Kahn: She was 15.

LK: She was 15 when we came down here, forget about the Bat Mitzvah. She still had that in Fort Wayne. I'm all messed up.

RH: Tell me a little bit about -- you're now the President of Shir Chadash?
Did you -- ?

LK: Correct.

RH: And tell me, did you start when you moved here, did you go to Shir Chadash?

LK: Yes. When I moved here our synagogue was Tikvat Shalom.

RH: Tikvat Shalom, OK.

LK: And rabbi at the time was Geoffrey Spector, actually he became the rabbi of Tikvat Shalom the year that I came down here, I believe. I think that when I came down here to meet Hugo and work, was the time that Hugo was interviewing Rabbi Spector to come down and be the rabbi for Tikvat Shalom. And so I actually started out here, our synagogue was Tikvat Shalom. And I was active on the various boards and sisterhood. And in 2000, is that correct? Did we join with Chevra Tillim, which was another conservative congregation that used to be orthodox here in the community.

RH: That was the one on Napoleon?

LK: Yes.

HK: Clairborne

RH: Claiborne.

LK: Claiborne. And Rabbi Bachman (sp?) was, I think, their last rabbi. And when he left, their congregation had dwindled a little and they decided, we along with them decided that a merger between the two

congregations would be a nice thing. And we did. We had a nice parade with the Torahs down the streets, and we joined. And I think that that was right around 2000, somewhere around there.

RH: I didn't realize it was so recent.

LK: I think it was.

RH: That's very interesting.

LK: It could have been 1999, but I think it was -- it's been pretty recent. So, before we say that for sure we better check that out, exactly what year that was, because I don't remember exactly.

RH: OK. And tell me, did you grow up Conservative or did you grow up -- ?

LK: I grew up really nothing, and I am a Jew by choice. I converted in 19-- shortly after I came over here to this country, I can't remember exactly.

RH: And I think we should probably say what country you came from.

LK: Denmark.

RH: OK.

LK: I grew up in Denmark.

RH: And what year did you come to the States, do you remember?

LK: 1960.

RH: 1960?

LK: Yes.

RH: OK, so you converted shortly --

LK: Shortly after that.

RH: -- after that. OK. So you've experienced at least a few Jewish communities, is there anything special about the New Orleans Jewish community?

LK: I have experienced a few Jewish communities, because I've also lived in Israel. I lived in Tel Aviv for a year.

RH: Oh really?

LK: And my youngest daughter went through fifth grade in Tel Aviv, she went through Ahavat Zion. So, once upon a time, I actually was able to read, write, and speak. Can't do either one of them anymore, but at one time I did. We have a lot of family in Israel.

RH: Do you want to say how you managed to get from Copenhagen to Israel, and then to the States?

LK: Well, with my deceased husband, who thought that it would be a really good idea if we knew our roots and our family there. And so we went there in 1985, '86, to learn the language and to get to know our family, and to get a connection to the country. And so that's what we did. So we lived in Tel Aviv for a good year. My husband was ill and we actually thought maybe we would make Aliyah, and then because of his illness it didn't happen.

RH: And so then you came to the States?

LK: So then we went back to the States, yes.

RH: So you have experienced a number of different kinds of Jewish communities.

LK: Yes. New Orleans is different. It's really very, from my perspective, it's really very different. In the cities that I've lived before, they were smaller communities and so we had a very small congregation, but a very cohesive one and, I don't even know how to say, everyone was just part of the same thing. I lived in Gary, Indiana, and went to the synagogue there, and to the synagogue in Hammond, Indiana, because the Gary, Indiana synagogue moved to Hammond. And then lived in Valparaiso for a while, Valparaiso, Indiana, and the synagogue there was a combination of Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative, and everything else, because it was a small community and we had, like, 27 family units. But it was a very, very, very warm and very religious, in a way, very observant community. And so it was probably more Conservative than it was Reform. And then we went by (inaudible) of Israel, Miami, back to Fort Wayne. And Fort Wayne has a large Jewish community, but the larger portion is Reform, smaller portion is Conservative. I've always belonged to the Conservative. And it has undergone some changes, but also a very great little community. Doesn't seem to work as -- has a Federation, a Jewish Federation, but that doesn't seem to be nearly as involved as it is here. I think that on a community-wide basis, this is a much different community.

RH: Can you articulate a little about, it's more active with the Federation here, you're saying? (phone rings, mail voice)

LK: Here, I think that the Federation does an incredible amount of work. I think it has done a good job making sure that we all get involved, regardless of what affiliation we are with, whether we are Conservative, or Reform, or whatever. We all take part in this. So I think that this Federation has done an amazing job making sure that we all know each other. And I think that's more, from my perspective anyway, and maybe it's mine only, I think that that's how that I have become to feel, I don't know, this is not going to sound right. I think it's much more out there, and certainly it has been for me here, but I also think that that's part of Hugo, because of Hugo. Hugo was very, very, very involved in the Federation, and it was just natural that I moved along with him into that. I think that's why. I think in my other life we were more involved with Israel Bonds, than maybe than we were with Federation, per se.

RH: OK. Do you feel that it's a fairly -- I would say, how would you characterize the community? A welcoming community?

LK: I think this is a very welcoming community. It has been to me, absolutely. I fell into a lap of good friends here within the Jewish community, absolutely. Again, I have heard that for people coming from the outside, that this is a difficult community to break into. For me it wasn't, and again I think because I was lucky enough to meet Hugo, so we got a --

RH: Mm hmm. Why don't we talk a little about Katrina now, and move into that story. When did Katrina enter your personal radar screen?

LK: Katrina entered our personal radar screen when we knew that the hurricane was coming and that it was coming here. And like everybody else, we packed up a pair of shorts, underwear, and was going to come back in a day or two. We actually didn't leave town. We went to Number One River Place, we have a friend, actually Hugo's boss, deceased boss, boss, I don't even know how to say it, and had an apartment in Number One River Place on the 12th floor. And we moved there, they were kind enough to let us use it. We were going to use it while Katrina came, two days, three days, and we would come back home. As you know, that didn't happen. We stayed at Number One River Place during Katrina, and for Monday and Tuesday, and actually thought we'd come back out and see how things were, only we weren't able to get out here, of course. So Wednesday, when the water in the city gave out and it was coming, the water was flooding the city, and the city declared martial law, we left like everybody else. And left to go to Galveston, because our daughter, Margie, lives in Galveston, so we were going to go there. So we drove to Galveston --

RH: Did you have any trouble getting out of the city?

LK: I think we just made it across the bridge before they closed it, so we didn't really have any problems.

RH: What was it like? I think of One River Place as fairly exposed, at least right there on the river.

LK: Yes.

RH: And 12th floor --

LK: I can tell you that when the power went out, it was 12 floors that we had to walk once in a while, but we had a couple of river pilots there who were able to get some diesels so that we could run the elevators. And we did have a little bit of power. And how was it there during the night when Katrina hit? Scary. The building was moving a little. And the soffits and the balconies on the north side where we were came apart, and the water came in and ran along the ceiling. And also because of the wind wearing so heavy, would come through the doors into the living room from the balcony. I thought the windows for sure were going to break. They didn't, they held, but it was scary when the soffits, the parapet would hit the windows. And, yeah, it was scary. I think, I don't know, we might have been three or four families that stayed during Katrina.

RH: In the building?

LK: In the building, along with the security, yes. When we came back -- well, then we went to Galveston. It was interesting, my sister back home in Denmark was getting married. And, see, Katrina hit in August so my sister got married September the 13th. Katrina hit August 29th. And the two of us were going to go for my sister's wedding, then when Katrina came we decided we weren't going to go. So we cancelled our tickets. Then, when we hit Galveston, and then Rita was coming, my sister was still getting married, we thought, this is ridiculous. You might as well

go, Lis. So we got my ticket again, and I didn't have any clothes, so I went to Denmark borrowing some of Jonnie Hyman's clothes, and Jonnie had been deceased for three years, probably. But we still had her clothes in the apartment. So, I borrowed a couple of dresses from Jonnie, hoping that she would be OK with that.

RH: Now, what apartment was this? One in Galveston? Oh no, the apartment from One River Place.

LK: From One River Place. I went and I wore one of Jonnie's dresses for my sister's wedding in Denmark. And Hugo didn't go, because he needed to stay back in Galveston and watch Rita, and figure out what was going on. I don't know.

RH: Did you realize by Wednesday, you must have realized that --

LK: I knew we couldn't come back here. We tried, and you couldn't get out here.

RH: Out here to where your house is.

LK: Right. Could not get out here.

RH: And so you were pretty sure it was flooded.

LK: Actually, we knew it was flooded. We didn't think, we knew that it was, because my son-in-law from Fort Wayne, Indiana, came down here with one of the first rescue missions. He drove an emergency medical - - he actually runs an emergency medical thing and came down here with some trucks. But he also flew with a helicopter and came over here, and called us and said, you guys are flooded. And we said, we

can't be. And he said, your backyard is under water. I can guarantee you you're flooded. And sure enough, we were. So we knew we were flooded, and although he had said so, we still thought, well, maybe we weren't, but we were.

RH: When did he let you know that?

LK: When did he let us know that? While we were --

RH: Still at River?

HK: Galveston.

LK: In Galveston. Yeah, probably while we were in Galveston.

HK: We saw it on the satellite before he even came here.

LK: So then I went to the wedding, and then while I was over there we thought well, shoot, we have a daughter in London, might as well go say hello to her. And --

RH: Make the best of a bad situation.

LK: And our little grandson, Toby, yes. So Toby was just a little more than a year, no, he wasn't even a year. Wait a minute, I'm so screwed up.

HK: Were they still in France, or were they in London?

LK: Wait a minute.

RH: Hugo, do you want to come in?

LK: He's going to have -- I'm so screwed up.

HK: No, he wasn't born yet.

RH: 2005, so, it's a fog, most people say that --

HK: He was born in December.

LK: No, wait a minute. Toby wasn't even born. My daughter was expecting. Toby wasn't born until December.

RH: Mm hmm. OK.

LK: And I just went over there then just for a day or two to see her in London and came right back to Denmark.

Hugo Kahn: Toby's two?

LK: Yeah.

HK: So, he was two in December of '06.

LK: Right, he was born.

HK: So he was born.

LK: He was born, I thought he was born.

HK: We had gone there, and then we again, we went again for some reason.

LK: Yeah, he was born, I thought he was there.

RH: OK, tell me --

LK: Then when I came back, and we had to figure out what to do. We got in the car, and we spent roughly eight weeks on the road. Instead of coming back and maybe getting, trying to find a place to live or whatever -- and you know, we couldn't get into the city, because we were in the wrong zip code, number one. One of those that you came into later. And so we decided that we would visit kids and relatives. So we spent eight weeks on the road. So we went from Galveston to Atlanta, from Atlanta to Charleston, South Carolina. And we would

spend three or four days. In Atlanta we had friends, and Charleston, South Carolina, we had Teri, our daughter, so we spent about a week there, or four, five days. And then we went from there to, I think Hugo's brother who lives in Philadelphia. And then we went to Fort Wayne -- we went to Ann Arbor, Michigan, with a daughter, and Fort Wayne, Indiana, with a daughter. And to Omaha, Nebraska, where Hugo actually spent most of his life over here in this country -- Hugo was born in Germany. And then we went to St. Louis, and back to Galveston. And while we were in Philadelphia we were able to come and take a look at the damage here. It happened that the guy who bought Krauss and who's converting Krauss where Hugo was the President, Krauss Department Store, converted them, was able to drive through this area here, he had gotten a pass I think from some official, so that he could look at his works around. But because he knew we lived here, he was able to come on out here and look, and saw that we had some problems, that we were under water, and whatever. And actually called us up and said, you probably should come down and take a look, and just see the damage, and I can help you with your house, whatever. And so because of that, while we were in Philadelphia --

RH: Oh, stop --

(break in audio)

RH: OK. We were talking about your eight city tour, or eight week tour of various cities, but I'm very interested in Shir Chadash also, and was there a plan for the evacuation, and what did you do?

LK: Yes, we have a plan. We had a plan in place and we have, of course, one now as well. But what we did, we tried to secure everything that we could, that was securable. And our Torahs, we had made arrangements to take across the parking lot over to the Federation offices, and so all seven of them we carried over there when we knew that Katrina was going to be a most possible hit to us. So we were able to save all our Torahs. The synagogue, however, ended up with water, and lost everything in the synagogue that was on the floor and that touched the floor, so that we ended up gutting halfway up the walls. And the National Guard actually came in with Ralph Lupin and cleaned out our sanctuary and helped get stuff and debris out, so that we were able to have Rosh Hashanah services right after Katrina hit in the sanctuary, on bare cement floor, with chairs from wherever. And we've worked incredibly hard to rebuild, and repair, and fix our synagogue up. It's been a job, and with that, with Katrina, you know, like many of the other synagogues, we lost a fairly large number of our members. I took office in January as Katrina had hit. Bob Katcha was actually the President when Katrina hit, and it was my turn in January. We go from January two years to January, whereas most of the other synagogues change offices in the summers.

RH: And so actually, were you in contact at all, being the next president, were you in --

LK: We were, as best as we could, you know, via email. And again, through the Federation, and also our own computer gurus, we were able to just stay pretty much in touch, and we knew pretty much what was going on with the synagogue, and with each other.

RH: Tell me more about that, and with each other. You mean just --

LK: The members of our congregation. And so at least the leadership knew what was being done and who was there. And Will Samuels actually came back to town rather early, and was very instrumental in making sure that we had our regular services, and that we were able to carry on and do our services. We used to be able to have a high holiday cantor from Israel, but because Katrina, and because of our loss of finances, and loss of members, we were no longer in a position to engage him. And actually after Katrina we had our homegrown high holiday cantors as it were, so Will and Elliot Finkelstein served as our high holiday cantors last year after Katrina.

RH: Wow. That's rather nice.

LK: It was. It was pretty amazing. We have some really very knowledgeable people in our synagogue who are able to do a lot of stuff.

RH: I understand also that your rabbi was --

LK: Rabbi Ted Lichtenfeld, bless his heart. We had just hired Rabbi Lichtenfeld to start August 1st, as Katrina hit on August the 29th. He had just come down here, and Katrina hit, and his family went back up east where they came from, and Rabbi Lichtenfeld spent some time in Houston. And then actually, interesting, he led the services for all our -- a lot of our members went to Houston after Katrina, so he held services for the Shir Chadash members in Houston, and we ourselves, some of us, had high holiday services here, without the rabbi. It was interesting.

RH: Wow. Tell me about, so you were here for the high holiday, at Shir Chadash for the services?

LK: We were not, but a lot of members were. And as I said, Will was instrumental in making sure that -- that was immediately after Katrina.

RH: Right.

LK: Yes. And then this next year after Katrina is when --

RH: Right, 2006.

LK: Right. But we had some modified high holiday services here for sure right after Katrina.

RH: Right, other people have talked about that.

LK: Yes, we did. And actually we were in Fort Wayne at that particular time.

RH: So who were you connecting with as you drove -- you were definitely connecting with your family, but --

LK: And with members of our synagogue, friends from our synagogue here. The leadership in the synagogue, and our friends, the Mexicks (sp?), and the Samuels, and the Browns, and lots of families here as best as we could. So it was interesting. So we had a pretty good idea of where everybody was. And with that too through the Federation's list we were able to keep track of each other.

RH: What were some of the concerns that were coming up at that time?

LK: How many of us were going to be here? Who was leaving, who was coming back? How were we going to manage? Was Rabbi going to come back once he saw what it was? You know, he could just as soon have said, thank you very much, I'm not coming back. But he didn't say that. He said, I'm anxious, and I'm interested, and I want to come back. So in January he came back, but in the meantime he stayed up north, up east actually, where he was from. And we did our own thing, and I think we did our own thing well while we tried to figure out how to repair our synagogue, how to get finances for our synagogue, how to figure out how to make our budget work, how to get our synagogue organization, our parent organization, the United Synagogue interested in us, how to get them to help us. And I can tell you that that was a struggle. There was a real struggle. Contrary to how the Reform and the Orthodox communities worked, we saw nothing of our parent group, heard very little from them, and actually it wasn't until we had had many, many, many calls and discussions with them and nine

months or so after Katrina that they even paid a visit here. They had paid a visit to Biloxi, no, Mobile. Biloxi? Mobile?

RH: There's one in Biloxi and there's two synagogues, there's a Conservative synagogue in Mobile. And I believe the one in Biloxi or Gulfport is also Conservative.

LK: Right. Those congregations had had some visits, but we belonged to different regions, and different regions were able to do different things. And so our region, the one that we belonged to, was just really large, and it was, I guess, hard for them to find time, figure out a way to get down to see us. I don't know. It was frustrating, I can tell you that, it's still frustrating. But, eventually they did come, and eventually we did get some help from them to help us with our synagogue. In the meantime we had embarked on our own little ways to make sure that we were able to get some financial help to help us build.

RH: What did you end up doing?

LK: We ended up via networking, we sent out letters to 700 plus congregations in the country, telling them about the damage that we suffered and the problems that we had post-Katrina. To please, if there was anything that they had that they didn't need that we could use, to please forward it to us, and certainly financial help was absolutely needed. And through a Conservative congregation in Cleveland, that was just most amazing, they came down not once but twice to give us a helping hand. And through some ideas from them, we actually

established a friend of Shir Chadash category, called the Haver or Haverim membership, so that people belonging to other Conservative congregations could become a member for a small amount and by those donations help us recover and rebuild. And so that's what we did.

RH: That's a clever idea.

LK: And so we have --

RH: How did you work with the other congregations here and the Federation?

LK: The Federation helped us through the United Jewish Communities. And through the United Jewish Communities and the Endowment Foundation, we were able to get some help based upon number of families, similar to all the other synagogues in the area. And we are unbelievably grateful both to the Endowment and the Federation, the United Jewish Communities, for their help. Without it I'm not so sure where we would've been.

RH: Really?

LK: I'm not sure at all. We lost a third of our membership, but with that we lost more in dues, because many of our members were people who had been members for a long time, like us, who were perhaps in a higher dues classification. But we lost a lot of professionals. We lost lawyers, and we lost physicians that were members of our congregation, a large number. And when that happens it becomes

more difficult. I will say that the members who stayed back have been very, very hard working, and have contributed, you know, with their presence and with whatever they've been able to do. And for that reason, you know, I'm really proud to say that we're up and running and alive.

RH: Yeah. So did a lot of the older members from your congregation not come back?

LK: A fair number of our -- members who have families, children, elsewhere, moved. People who had retired and who saw really no longer any future here, who probably, like many of us, don't ever want to see another hurricane, but who suffered so much that it was just too impossible and too improbable to be back, left. So older members and, as I said, our young professionals, many of them left.

RH: And so some with children, too.

LK: Some of the younger families, young families, professional families left. Young families with children left, some of them settled way up east, and some of them in Denver, several of them in Atlanta, scattered all over the place. You know, once you move with a family and you have children, and you find a job, and the children are settled in school, and they are happy there, and they are making it, it's quite a commitment to come back here where things are still unsettled and uncertain. And do you know if you absolutely have a job? Do you know if your school is open? Do you know this, that, and the other? It's hard. And I would

think that if I was a young family with children I'd have to think really hard about coming back, if I was settled, had a job, my kids were happy in school. So for the ones who didn't come back, you can't blame them I don't think.

RH: OK. That was one of my questions. Are you frustrated with the people who haven't come back?

LK: No, I'm not. I wish they were back, but I wish that I could say to them, come back and everything is wonderful. You'll have your job, your house is fine, there's nothing to worry about anymore. But you can't say that. And so no, I understand it very, very well. It's not to say that we wouldn't love to have them all back because we would, but I certainly understand that it is difficult to come back sometimes.

RH: So how does a congregation that's lost so much, how do they come back together?

LK: You know, you work hard. It is, as we started out, it is like we are absolutely going to make it. We are going to make sure that it is going to be as good, if not better, than before. And everyone seems to be in that spirit. You know, we're here, by golly, we're going to make this thing work. So we are.

RH: So you are.

LK: Yeah.

RH: You've also --

LK: It's been exciting. It has been exciting -- it has been frustrating and exciting to see the synagogue coming back to life, seeing it being refurbished as it were. We had pews that came from Israel, because all our pews died in the storm, weren't fixable. And interestingly enough, Gates of Prayer got new pews too. And we were able to bring them over in the same shipment from Israel, so I think that helped both congregations a little bit. But it's just been so, it's been gratifying, it's been exciting, it's been frustrating, it's been all of these things to see it come back together, but it's worked.

RH: You're there on this corridor with other Jewish communities. Is there more conversation going on now across the street, and down the street, and with Chabad, or with Beth Israel, or with Gates of Prayer, than there used to be?

LK: Yeah. I think initially everybody looked at each other and we said, now what? What do we do now? And then as things settle into normal, I think everyone is busy with our own stuff again. However, through the Federation, and because of Federation's program on how to bring new people back to New Orleans, how they were able to bring all the agencies, including the synagogues, in so that we could all work together, trying to figure out how best to make Greater New Orleans, New Orleans and Metairie, a better place to be for all of us. That has been amazing. I think that Federation has been very instrumental in getting all of us to talk together, to talk more to each other than what

we perhaps did before. I think that that primarily, that we can thank the Federation for that primarily.

RH: What do you think are the challenges now for the Jewish community in New Orleans and for Shir Chadash?

LK: For the Jewish community, we need to make sure that we can attract Jews to New Orleans. And not -- professionals certainly, but not just professionals -- but we need to have a way to bring Jewish people here. We need to have, therefore, a vibrant community. We need to make sure that our synagogues are open and functioning, we need to make sure that we've got the day school, for heaven's sakes. Day school I think is vital to families with children. It's a good way to break in to the community. It's good for the kids to get to know each other. But with that I also think that we need to figure out how to get the entire community working, how to get our infrastructure back working, how to get our hospitals open, how to get the universities up and running to capacity and most of them are thank goodness. But we need to clean up our act all around here to make sure that this is a safe place. Perception of great New Orleans and Greater New Orleans, of quality of life, crime, is not terrific when you're out around the country. And somehow, somehow we need to get the message out that, look, it isn't as bad as what you hear. You can actually have a life here.

RH: Hmm. So, have you been frustrated with the city, state, federal response to the recovery?

LK: I'm probably, I don't know how to say this, I don't think that you can blame wholly the federal government. I think we all share an equal part in it. I don't know where we fell down, but if you look at the actual amount of monies that have been promised and also sent out for Katrina relief, I don't know where it got bogged down, I don't know who's responsible for what, but I think that if you look at it, it's frustrating, yeah, but I don't know where the hold up is exactly. I know that the federal government deserves a lot of blame, but I think so does state and city government. I wish you hadn't asked me that question (laughter). But I'm frustrated with the slowness of it all. But as I said, I don't know, I think we are all frustrated, and I don't know exactly where, I don't know enough about it to be able to put a blame on any one entity. I get frustrated surely when the President comes down here and says, we are absolutely going to make sure that you are whole. And I get frustrated when two years down the road we're not whole, and we can still have people from federal government come down here and say, but my goodness, we'll still work with you, and you're not whole. And we're not. But as I said, I don't know. I don't know where the hold up is exactly. When I read the papers and I listen to everybody it seems like we should have been farther along than where we are, that money did come somewhere, but I don't know where it's sitting. I don't know where it went. I can't see where it went. I know that there is frustration certainly with the road home, there's frustration with the

rebuilding of the canal walls and the levees. With the potholes, I mean, for God's sake, everything is frustrating. It's frustrating for me that it has taken us 23 months and four days before we could get back in here. That it's going to take us 27 days before I can have a telephone, landline telephone. It's frustrating. I don't know who I blame for that. But it's frustrating. So, yeah --

RH: I know that with the Federation they talked about how it's hard for the Jewish community to come back if the larger community's not coming back, that the fates are intertwined.

LK: That is exactly right. That is exactly right.

RH: And so when you want to move forward on this end you are kind of dependent on the movement in another place.

LK: So I said 'til we get our city, and our infrastructure, and our businesses back, and up running, so we can attract something and we have some programs, we can't. We can't. You can't just ask them to come down in a vacuum with us and there's nothing.

RH: OK, we're going to wrap up on this, one tape.

END OF AUDIO FILE 1

RH: So this is tape two with Lis Kahn, for Katrina's Jewish Voices. And you were talking on the last tape -- oh, please introduce our new guest.

LK: Oh, this is Juliet. (referring to dog) Juliet Kahn. Juliet is three years old, she is an Italian greyhound, and she is originally from Washington.

She came down post-Katrina. We had another one, same kind of dog, that belongs to Karna (sp?), our daughter who is Washington DC, that was Dasher. When we lost Dasher to Karna again, we needed another dog, so Juliet came from Washington DC down to us. Yes, you did.

RH: And so Dasher, though, was with you during the storm, is that right?

LK: Right, Dasher, because Dasher's mom, Karna, was in Kenya when Katrina hit and wasn't able to come back here for reasons that was not related to Katrina. She got stranded in Kenya for three days, three days three nights, and by the time she could finally get out Katrina had hit, and she ended up having a choice of either coming over here -- coming over here, I mean, to the States -- or going to London. And we discussed, should she go to London where she also has a sister or should she go to Miami where she has a sister? And I thought it was smarter that she came to the States, at least over to this country. So she came to Miami, spent about eight or nine days in Miami. She was a PhD student with Tulane in International Development, managed to get herself transferred to Washington DC to the School of International Development up there, SAIS, and along with Tulane to be able to continue in her program up there. And she's now also working for a not-for-profit foundation called The Sullivan Foundation up there.

RH: In Washington.

LK: In Washington DC.

RH: Was she able to finish at Tulane? Or is she --

LK: She is still not finished. She's still a PhD candidate and while she's also working to finish her thesis or whatever it is that she needs to finish.

RH: OK. And so is she still at Tulane or is she transferred now?

LK: I believe that she's still at Tulane, she will still be a Tulane PhD graduate. Somehow they were able to just work out whatever it is they work out so she didn't lose anything, and she were able to fill in what she needed to do up there. She was actually with the Payson program here in International Development. Former Dean of Tulane, Eamon Kelly is the chair of the (inaudible) or the, whatever you call the president, the man in charge of the Payson Program, which is here, of which there's just one here and one in DC.

RH: OK. So you traveled around the country, and you had Dasher with you for eight weeks?

LK: Mm hmm.

RH: And when did you first get back to New Orleans?

LK: Oh god, I'm so bad with --

RH: Months, or?

LK: No. After the, let's see, Katrina hit, after the high hol-- oh, I know, we came back in December. We came back in December. Maybe mid, in December, because we were here for December. And I remember the first new year was so weird. It was so weird. We missed our friends, and we knew they were gone, but we always were a group who got together for New Year's in somebody's house or maybe we would go

out somewhere, because one of our very, very good friends happened to have a birthday on January 31st, so we would always be celebrating with them somewhere, so we would be doing something. This year, while we still have friends in town, our core group had kind of dissipated, and during the day for New Year's Hugo and I were kind of looking at each other and saying, you know what? This doesn't feel right. This just doesn't feel right. Doesn't feel like New Year's. What's going on here? That was an interesting experience, because all of a sudden the loss was just really, really visible. I think until then, and even on a daily basis, you know, you're busy with your stuff. You're busy trying to get everything working, but that one day, that one evening, that was a funny feeling.

RH: A lonely New Year.

LK: That was a lonely feeling, yeah. Interesting.

RH: And did a lot of the members of your core group come back?

LK: No. A lot of members of our core group did not come back. But you know what happens? The core gets substituted, you know? There was still some left from the core, and then you just kind of, you have other friends, you know, and they just move in and take the place of the ones that you lost. So that's been an interesting development as well, too. It's nice to realize how many friends you have, and how easy it is to just continue. And so the tier may be a little different and it's maybe a little bit wider, but it's every bit as warm and as lovely.

RH: Hmm. That's nice. So you took 23 months --

LK: And four days. (laughter)

RH: And four days to get back into your house.

LK: Right.

RH: And I noticed a trailer outside, but you didn't live in the trailer?

LK: No, we had initially, you know, we went down to One River Place, but it wasn't our apartment, and it was on the market. And although we probably could have stayed there, it's not yours, and you don't want to make it more difficult for them when it's on the market by being there. There were repairs as I told you. When we came back -- no, I don't think I told you -- when we came back to One River Place, and we did stay there for another couple of months after Katrina, there was mold growing in the apartment on the 12th floor, on the carpets. And there was mold up the wall where the water had come in along the ceiling and come down on the wall, some of the separating walls, from when the parapet came off from the balconies, and it was exposed then on the side. And so we ended up, Hugo actually ended up taking all the carpet off with the help of some friends, and we had some people come in, all the carpets. And we cut a foot up on the wall in the den there, because we had mold actually growing on the walls as well. It was --

RH: So you repaired your friend's apartment.

LK: So we, (laughter), so we were there, yeah. And then, you know, when -
- my daughter used to live in a little shotgun on Green Street when she
was going to Tulane. And Green Street didn't get a lot of damage. We
had some roof damage, and we had the water come up to enough that
it just moved the foundation a little bit on Green Street, you know, it
sits up on these little stilt posts.

RH: Piers, kind of.

LK: Little pier things, yeah. And we had some siding that had been torn off,
but it was certainly livable. And we had the damage repaired, and we
have a family that belongs to Shir Chadash whose house had gotten
completely demolished. And they had purchased another house, and it
also -- just before Katrina -- and it also got wet. So the old house that
they had got completely demolished and the new house they
absolutely needed to have repaired and finished before they could
move in, and they had two little boys. So they had been renting from a
friend, and that friend was coming back, and they needed a place to
stay, so they stayed in the little shotgun on Green Street for a couple of
months. It was supposed to have been a few weeks, became a couple
of months. So in March, first of March, late February, first of March, we
were able to move into Green Street, and we left the apartment so that
it could be easily shown and sold. And the apartment, One River Place,
is now sold. And so we stayed in Green Street, then the family who
was living in the Green Street, our friends, were able to move into their

own house in Metairie, and then we moved into Green Street. And we've been in this little one bedroom shotgun since March of last year, whenever it was.

RH: Is it like starting over, and like, you're a college kid yourself? (laughter)

LK: Well, we were college kids because we had Karna's old furniture, I mean, this is ridiculous. (laughter) You know, we had all of her old furniture, and double bed, and just kind of interesting. Funny thing, we were able to bring an old couch from my office upstairs here over to Green Street. And because of the humidity and because of all this stuff, the little straps, you know, under the seat cushions, had deteriorated. And so you'd sit down and you'd kind of fall down, you know (laughter). And we looked at this stuff and we thought, is this worth repairing? And it looks pretty, but it really wasn't worth repairing. So to keep the pillows we had 22 phonebooks under the pillows, under the three cushions in the couch. And I have to tell you, it's a lot better than a plywood board, because it gives just enough that it's not too uncomfortable. That's all phonebooks. So I highly recommend that. (laughter)

RH: This is a good hint to someone for the next storm.

LK: There you go. Anyway, so --

RH: 23 phonebooks.

LK: Yeah, so we were on Green Street. And then, interesting little tidbits about how irritating some things are. When we left here, we asked,

could we please take this phone number to Green Street so that we wouldn't have to learn a new phone number. Absolutely we could not. So we got a phone number for Green Street. So when we left -- and I actually like that number -- so now that we were ready to leave Green Street and we have to come back out here we said, could we please have our Green Street phone number back so we don't have to learn a new number again, because you told us that we couldn't have the old phone number. No, we couldn't have the Green Street phone number, and we couldn't have the old phone number. And when we said, "Well, does anyone have the old number?" "Well, I don't know, let's see." So they come back and they say, "No, nobody has it." "So then why can't we have it?" And a few more conversations, few other things, no, we could have our old phone number back. So now we will have our old, old phone number back.

RH: Old, old.

LK: Old, old, in 27 days. (laughter)

RH: Wow.

LK: And that's, I think, one of the more frustrating things. I have no internet connection out here. Used to be on DSL and WiFi, and that all didn't go. The citywide system doesn't come out here, and because there is so much destruction in mid-city and this area, it's taking longer to get services out here, therefore when we moved in, 27 days before the phone. So we're counting down, 20 days now before we have a phone

number and they're able to come out and hook us all up. So we can have the internet access. In the meantime, like everybody else, you go to a coffee shop or I go to the synagogue, or try to figure out where I can hook up.

RH: How about your neighbors? Are many of them back?

LK: I think that on this street, between Harrison and Mirabeau, we are probably the eighth. I admire our neighbors right next door there. They've been here a long time. They're in their 80's. They lived on the second floor while they had the first floor fixed up. And when I said to them, how in the world could you do that? They said to me, if you had been in a one room apartment for a couple of months you could have done it too. I don't know, I'm not sure that I could.

RH: So when you say the eighth, I'm trying to think of how many people are right in this area.

LK: I'm on the civic organization here, and I would say that we probably have, maybe we're ten percent.

RH: Back?

LK: Maybe ten percent.

RH: Wow.

LK: Out here.

RH: And this is a fairly integrated neighborhood.

LK: Very. It's a very integrated neighborhood.

RH: Which is a little unusual, frankly. I mean, people like to claim it, but --

LK: But it's, no, it's lovely. It is absolutely lovely. We have amazing neighbors, we had amazing neighbors, we have, the ones who are back, amazing. And it is really nice. It's nice when you see them come in. The family that lived directly across the street from us is now living down in 1750. We have a new little family that moved in, they came from Chalmette. It's an African American family that moved across the street. And they are as lovely as can be. There's a little ten year old girl there, her name is Tina. She's so cute. They're lovely. Right next door to them is another African American young lady and a partner, I think, I'm not sure if they're married. So, but they're lovely, lovely, lovely. We have a Japanese or a Far Eastern family a couple of houses down. Lovely. Paulette Irons lives on this street, interesting, and she's a nice lady.

RH: Is she a judge now?

LK: She's a judge, mm hmm.

RH: Ex-state senator and judge.

LK: Right. She lives close to Mirabeau. And it's just, it really is a lovely, lovely neighborhood, and it has always been a lovely neighborhood.

RH: So you said you've been in the civic organization?

LK: Here, mm hmm, Bancroft Homeowners, a civic organization.

RH: And are you --

LK: We, like everybody else, had a night out against crime.

RH: Were you engaged in the unified plan?

LK: We are. We are. I am more in the periphery, but we are working very hard with the city and with the Gentilly Plan, because we are so close. And by some areas we are actually sometimes considered part of the Gentilly platform. A couple of our people on the board are far more involved than I am in that, but it's moving and we've been moving right along. We have worked hard to make sure that we meet all the requirements, and that anything that goes on here is absolutely up to code. We are working hard with the levee board and everybody else, make sure that things are done the way they should be. Working on a police patrol here. We used to have our own patrol here in the neighborhood. Because of the small number of occupants that we now have here on Bancroft Street, not just in this area but the entire street, the small number of occupants that we have, we are no longer able to hire our own yet so we've been talking both with the Lakeview Organization and Gentilly to see if there's some way that we can band together and hire our security forces. In the meantime the National Guard, thank you, has been able to and allowed to come here and patrol for us. And that has been really, really a great thing. We have had some break-ins out here, and we have had them in the daytime. Both houses across the street were hit one day in the daytime. We were lucky not to have been hit, I mean we, personally.

RH: So safety, when there's only ten percent of people back, safety becomes a real issues, doesn't it?

LK: It becomes an issue. It's a funny thing. When we walk the dog, for instance, when we walk the dog in the morning or when we walk the dog at night we don't see anybody. I mean, you see some lights in some of the few houses that you know are occupied, but you don't see anybody. It's strange. And that's kind of spooky. When you drive out here, you know, because so much is not rebuilt from the mid-city and if you want to go uptown, you know, unless you go down past the St. Bernard Project and hit the expressway, you know, you drive down through all these abandoned areas. There are no lights in the mid-city area.

RH: There aren't?

LK: No. There's nobody there. You go up Harrison, Harrison is dead for all practical purposes. You go down Carrollton at night and surrounding, there's nobody. I mean, there really isn't. It's a huge area of the mid-city that's not repopulated. So you come out here, you feel kind of lonely. We don't have a grocery store.

RH: Where do you go?

LK: Well, right now, you go to Saver Center on Carrollton. And if that in fact gets sold, you wonder who's coming in to take it. We used to have Lakeview on Harrison Avenue, we don't have that anymore. We don't have Robert's on Robert E. Lee anymore. We had a little Whole Foods store on Esplanade, then it closed up. Then Lakeview, I think, tried down there for a month or two and didn't make it. We just, just now

have another little store down there called the Market, so we go to the Market on Esplanade. So that's, you know, you used to -- well, we now have Starbucks, is on Harrison. And it used to be Coffee and Company, which was a nice little restaurant. Starbucks is OK too, it's better than nothing. (laughter)

RH: And this is two years.

LK: This is two years. This is two years. We've got houses still that aren't gutted on this street, not many but a couple. Most of them are gutted out, however. That's a good thing. That's a good thing, because that means that at least it's being taken care of and being refixed. And some of them are, you know -- the bayou's still beautiful.

RH: You're right on the bayou here. So how many feet of water did you have in your home?

LK: Four.

RH: Four feet.

LK: And across the street they had eight or nine. Across the street. We sit up so high that we thought for sure, as I said earlier, we wouldn't get any water, but we did. Across the street, eight and nine feet.

RH: So theirs came from the London Avenue canal, I'm guessing?

LK: Came from the London Avenue canal, and maybe hit the 17th Canal somewhere. I think we were just, like, right in the middle of everything. And then of course what is called the city, think there was another one right here, in the middle of all three of them.

RH: You mean another canal?

LK: Mm hmm.

RH: Yeah, I'm not sure which one that is. I mean, you're right here at Bayou St. John. Did that flood?

LK: The bayou?

RH: Is that what came over, the four feet?

LK: No.

RH: No?

LK: It didn't. It came from this side.

RH: It really came from the London.

LK: It came from that side, came from the London primarily. Came from the London absolutely. Because Park Island didn't flood. It sits up still higher than we did, so the damage they got over there was wind. Here, we had a huge, huge, huge oak tree out there, a good five feet in diameter, fell. We had several other huge oak trees, they fell. So we had a backyard that was so well shaded with trees, we had a Japanese maple by the pool, we had a couple of other trees, we ended up with the three sycamores, and that was what was left here for us. We had a huge magnolia tree in the front, it fell. We had some wind damage as well, and we lost a fair amount of shingles from the roof, like a lot of others, and it was just -- we had a very nice terrace, kind of a front yard, we ended up with no front yard. And it's interesting.

RH: You know when you've lost your home --

LK: I can tell you something. When we got a telephone call from the contractor, or the builder, or the guy who bought Krauss, and said, I think you should come back here and take a look, and see what you have, so you could figure out what it is that you want to do, I told you we were in Philadelphia and I really didn't want to come home. And I said to Hugo, you go and your brother, your twin brother. You go down and take a look at it, because I really can't. Well, I ended up coming down anyway, and it was so horrible that I said then and I still say, I think I would have been better off not having seen it. It was horrible. I had actually just moved my office from upstairs down to down here in the den, next to the den, in the other room in there, and I lost everything in my office. And my computer died, and everything died. I had my picture albums, and I had a lot of stuff, and I had a lot of antiques, and a lot of stuff from my old life, the life that I had in Indiana, you know, and whatever. And my pictures, my albums from Denmark, I had the whole thing down. I sat for a full day out there on the patio trying to figure out if I could save any of my pictures, any of my life, and cried, and found out that when you have colored pictures, at least old colored pictures, when they get wet, you get the prettiest abstracts but you sure as heck can't figure out what's there. And the albums were so squished together and wet that my whole first life died. Just died, except for some art, I have some art from a Danish artist who was a friend of mine, he's since deceased. His name is Bjorn Winblad, and

he made, in my other life for me and my then husband, some pieces and I have a lot. My dining room is my Danish room, it's my Winblad room, it's my, whatever. I have that. Everything else died. And I think that it would have been easier for me -- and maybe that's not true, because I really don't know -- but I think, I think that it had been easier for me if I hadn't seen it in the state that it was, if it had just like died and it wasn't there, I think I could have taken that easier than seeing the destruction of it and the fact that I couldn't save it. I couldn't save it. And I was really, really unhappy and really depressed. And Hugo said to me, "Lis, for God's sake, you've been through worse." And I have. I had a stepdaughter who died at the age of 26 of Hodgkin's. I lost my husband, I lost my mother, and I did that within a year of each other. And it was horrible, and terrible, and somehow this was just almost as bad, because it was the last vestige, I think, of what I had. It was hard. It was an overwhelming feeling, very, very sad. And there are days when I still struggle with that, most of the time I'm all right, but there are days when I still struggle with it. Other than that, it's coming along. It's looking good, it's getting there.

RH: Well, I guess this is a nice time to turn to what you're most grateful for coming out of this.

LK: Everything. I think you just have to be grateful that, well, that you're here, that you have the means to be able to come back, and fix up. You know, there are a lot of people who don't have the means, and we

were fortunate enough to have, to come back in, and just remain here and still have our friends, still have our synagogue, still have -- it's the stuff that we have. While it's frustrating to rebuild, it is also fun to see it come together and see what you can do. And so sure, you miss your old stuff, but it's kind of been fun. I laugh at this house and the way that it's being done. And I'd say, look, a decorator probably wouldn't approve of this mix of stuff that I have, and I'll show you my living room and the dining room before you leave, but you know what, it's me. I like a collection of stuff, I like eclectic things, and that's what we got. May not match, it's not intended to. It's what I like. It's what we're comfortable with. It's what Hugo likes, or I think he maybe wouldn't say yes when I say, should we get this? So that has been good. In the synagogue it's been amazing. Our rabbi is in there with us. We just hired a new educational director in conjunction with the day school. And we are so fortunate. She's such a gem. Her name is Naomi Chase, she's such a gem. We needed her. She's great. Our members in the synagogue, we come, we have Wednesday morning minyans, we have Sunday minyans, we have services Friday night, we have services, of course, Saturday morning. And by and large they are well-attended when you count the families that we have. I am so looking forward to the high holidays. I think the high holidays will give us a real number. We'll see who all is really here, and I think at that time we will really

know who we have and what we have, and I think that's exciting, working towards that is great.

RH: Tell me about what the Jewish community's meant to you during this experience. (dog barking, laughter) Now you're going to make yourself known.

LK: The Jewish community has made me feel home. I think without it I would feel lost, but it has always been that for me. It has always been a place of comfort, it's been something that I could look to, a place where I could go and feel good. Whether it be in an organization, or in the synagogue, and for me probably the synagogue probably has always been the synagogue. I think when you, if you don't feel particularly good, I think when you go there, you feel good, at least I do.

RH: Did --

LK: I don't know if I'm answering your question.

RH: You are. Has your relationship to Judaism changed in any -- ?

LK: I don't think so. I don't think so. Not in any way. It hasn't become any less, it hasn't become any more. It's there, and I think it is funny as it has always been. My family is kind of funny. My mom's family, we were not really sure, somewhere on my mom's family we were, like a lot of other families, also Jewish, just never did. My mom's best friend was the old rabbi in Copenhagen. Funny thing not knowing many things. I went through conversion, which was a great thing, great thing, in Chicago. Great thing. I have a great feeling, great affinity for

Judaism always have had. Grew up during the war in Denmark, it was an interesting experience. My grandmother had a deli, so most amazing years. My little brother and I were sent away from home over there by ourselves, from our home to our grandparents with a backpack saying who we were and where we were going in 1943 and '44, and made our trip over there. And then had a babysitter who was caught dating one of the German soldiers, I believe. And they caught her in a train once between the city that we lived in and another city in the middle island of Denmark, and as was done at the time, shaved her head altogether so that people would know that that's not what you do. And shortly after that we then went back home. I couldn't attend school, because our school was closed and it was turned into a camp for the Germans. And so we home schooled. I was a Girl Scout, before you could be Girl Scout at a very young age, because I had to do something. So at curfew you would -- curfew was before 4:00 -- and you would have your parents or your father take you to whatever home that we happened to have school in or we happened to have little Scout meetings in. Lights out at 4:00, draw the curtains. Went into shelters a couple of times, more than a couple of times. Interesting journey all along when you think about it. Lucky that I'm here, fortunate that I'm here. Happy that I'm here. And when I say here I don't mean just here, I mean here in the States. So, it's funny, I had told you that I'm an RN and I'm an attorney, and I don't do either anymore. Had I

stayed back home in Denmark, with the way that you, at least when I went to school, they kind of separate you as you go on, they slot you kind of. You either go, they divvy you up when you're in fifth to sixth grade, and then they divvy you up again when you go from junior high to high school, and so you either go vocational or you go somewhere else where you go academic. (dog barks) And so you're slotted, and so I go, I am reasonably bright, or I was, so I would go academic. And I can absolutely for sure tell you that had I stayed back home in Denmark I would have been a professor at some university today. That's how I was sort of slotted and supposed to go, and it's what I would have been. (laughter) No way would I ever have been an attorney, and probably no way would I have been an RN, and I fell into that strictly by accident. Because when I came to this country, I thought that I would continue and be a teacher or a professor, so I was going to enroll at IU, because I came to Indiana. And I was going to concentrate and become a high school teacher or junior high school, and they said to me, the counselors that I interviewed with when I was being accepted, oh, oh you couldn't do that. You're way too young looking and you're Scandinavian, oh you could never handle American teenagers. You should concentrate on grade school. And I'm thinking, I'm a foreigner, I don't speak your language very well. How can I teach kids English and American history? I don't know it. I could teach gym and maybe French, I couldn't do this other stuff. So I thought, this is never going to

work. And I had gotten slips so I could enroll here, there, and everywhere actually. I was accepted, I could go to IU. So I come home and I'm thinking, this is not going to work. So on either side of me lived a nurse and they said to me, well, why don't you become a nurse? And I thought, well, my mom always wanted to be a nurse -- either that or an opera singer. She didn't become either one. My mom had a nice voice. So I thought, hmm, maybe that's not so bad. So I did. I became a nurse. And I was a nurse for many years. And before the term was coined I think I had a burnout, and I came home one day and I said, I need to do something else. And my husband said, "One doctor in the family is enough." I said, "That's fine, what about law?" He said, "I think that's a great idea." (laughter) So I took the admissions exam, the LSAT, and somehow I passed, and I enrolled in law school. And at the same time I also tried to sell real estate, because my dad wanted to do that once. So I did that, so I became a broker, a real estate broker. (laughter) And then I became a lawyer. So the only thing I probably never did that I thought I should have done was to become a Dallas Cowboy cheerleader. (laughter) I think that would have been great.

RH: So America opened up a lot of doors to you.

LK: A lot of stuff, would never have happened back home, not in a million years. So, see how lucky I am? Then I met Hugo. Lucky.

RH: Did Katrina bring back these memories of the war? Did those flood back?

LK: I think, I think, I think when my life in pictures died, when that was gone, I think. Because otherwise I think you don't really think much about it. But when all of a sudden you're confronted with this, then I think, yeah, I think so.

RH: And when you said you converted, was in Copenhagen your family just have to keep their Judaism hidden?

LK: We just didn't do anything. I didn't even know. Don't even know, didn't even know. Not even sure. Yes and no, I don't know, I don't know, I couldn't -- I never asked my mom, never asked my dad. My dad was definitely not Jewish. My mom sometime back, probably, but dad, no way, no how. Nice guy. I remember when I converted saying to my dad, "You know why I did that?" And he said, "Yeah." And I would tell him how, you know, I thought Jewish life was so wonderful. And he said, "Well, Lis, this is how we have always lived," which is true. It was just an interesting answer from him. "But Lis, this is how we have always lived." It was true. It was how we had always lived. So he didn't see whether I called myself one thing or another, didn't matter. It wasn't anything, it was just the way it was.

RH: Mm hmm. So when you say you always lived --

LK: We always did what you do, you take care of each other, you take care of your family, you do good to the next one, you do all these things. You rest when you're supposed to, you play when you're supposed to, you work hard, you take care of your families and your friends, and you

open your doors to strangers. All those things, we always did, we always have, we always do. It's interesting.

RH: So that's why Judaism feels so much like home.

LK: It's comfortable. It's home to me. It's comfortable, always has been. It's right.

RH: It's right?

LK: It's right.

RH: Have there been any, I don't know, observances that have been especially poignant, or prayers, or --

LK: You know what, I'm capable of doing parts of the service. And when I do Musaf or Shacharit, or once in a great while I've been asked and honored to do the Haftorah for the high holidays, and I have agreed to do half, I've done half before, it's so amazing. It's so amazing. You get this feel of awe and power, and it's just so great. I had a Bat Mitzvah, it was fantastic. I mean, you can do the whole thing. I tried to read Torah, that's hard. Oh my goodness is it hard. I even, one little section is so hard, I have such admiration for people who can just learn it and read it, or can just read it without any more having to learn it. We are going to, at Shir Chadash, start a class on teaching the trope for Torah reading, and I can't wait, because I'm going to be part of that. So great. I have a confession. I never really went to Wednesday morning minyan until I became President, felt that I needed to at least be there to help make sure that we had a minyan. Hugo has been going to Wednesday

morning for 40 some odd years. I didn't think that that would be something that you would look forward to doing, I always got up early but I sure didn't get up early to go for 7:00 minyan on Wednesday morning. But now, I get up early to go to minyan on Wednesday morning, because I like it, not because I have to, but I like it. In a million years I never thought I'd like to go to minyan Wednesday morning at 7:00. It's great. I go to Friday night services. I go to Friday night services also because I think that I need to, but I've come to figure out that that's nice too. (laughter) And you develop a closer kinship with the people who come consistently Friday night, and there's a handful who always show up. And we have others, but there's this little core, they always show up on Friday night, and it's good to see them, it's nice. And it's the same for Wednesday morning, and it's the same for the Men's Club minyan on Sunday. Now, the fact that we have a little breakfast on Wednesday morning and a study session afterwards, that helps, it doesn't hurt. It's kind of nice. And the fact that the Men's Club have a breakfast after their minyan on Sunday, that's nice too. But it's just, it's amazing. Everybody should try it, because they get to know that they would really enjoy it. And they just cheat themselves by not doing it, I think. So even when I'm no longer President, I will still go to Wednesday morning minyans because it is great. That I have learned. (laughter)

RH: Well, that was going to be one of my final questions, was what you've learned about yourself.

LK: I've learned that, that I have learned. (laughter) What else have I learned? I have learned that, I have known, but it has been reinforced, that I am really a strong person. That doesn't mean that I don't get depressed, and that I don't get angry, and I don't get difficult, but I know that deep down whatever the heck it is, I'll manage. Absolutely I'll manage. I'll manage because of who I am, what I have, who I'm married to, and the fact that I always have a religion, a synagogue, that I can go to. And if I don't feel good, I can feel good once I'm there, and once I'm with our people, with my people. I'm great. I wouldn't be great without it. For sure.

RH: I don't have any more questions.

LK: That's good.

RH: Do you have any more to say, because that's a beautiful way to finish.

LK: I'm happy --

END OF TRANSCRIPT